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ABSTRACT

A quiet revolution is in the process of changing academe. This revolution has been termed "academic capitalism" by S. Slaughter and L. Leslie (1997). Their ideas are the springboard for a discussion of the need for a systemic view of change in postsecondary education and why all members of the academic community should become involved in the changes that are shaping the future of higher education. Academic capitalism is defined as institutional and professorial market or market-like efforts to secure external moneys. Public higher education institutions have become dependent on income sources beyond the federal government, and that process is already changing the roles, rewards, and structures of academic institutions. The major financial advantages of academic capitalism include the generation of funds to replace those lost by the decline in government funding and the increase in unrestricted funds through the generation of more tuition dollars. Nevertheless, those who believe in the "invisible hand of the market" (A. Smith, 1776/1996) must recognize the difference between short-term and long-term gains. If the way in which funds are generated leads to a loss of quality in the higher education system or results in the denial of access to a large segment of the population, long-term interests will have been surrendered to short-term goals. Academic capitalism is neither an inherent evil nor an unmitigated blessing. As a strategy with the potential to harm or benefit universities, it must be understood. There must be serious national dialogue about the quiet revolution taking place in higher education. (Contains 20 references.) (SLD)

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Making the 'invisible hand' visible: The Case for Dialogue About Academic Capitalism

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2002

Oakland University

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Making the 'invisible hand' visible

The Case for Dialogue About Academic Capitalism

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> *What we essentially mean by a model is the way we have organized and structured our thinking about an issue, which gets reflected on down the line . . . in what we actually do (Sherman and Schultz, 1998)*

Mental models are the ways in which we represent and interpret the world. However, because they are embedded, our mental models are often transparent to us, and we become unable to reflect on or revise them. Letting go of our current mental models and forming new ones that allow us to view the world in new ways is challenging for everyone, including members of the university community. Today academe faces many challenges to its habitual ways of thinking about the world. *Faculty* members are being challenged to recognize that the economic pressures that universities face are long-term and structural. They are being challenged to see the world in new ways that allow them to join with administrators to insure the survival of the institutions they inhabit and the quality of the education they cherish. *Administrators and boards of trustees* are being challenged to understand the profound differences between industrial age management and the needs of today's organizations. They are being challenged to find ways of sustaining the educational quality and sense of community within our universities that are being threatened in the battle for financial sustainability. The *public* is being challenged to uphold the importance of access to higher education to insure the availability of the broadly educated citizenry vital to a democratic society and necessary in the twenty-first century workplace.

The Quiet Revolution

Many academics still believe that higher education will weather yet another historic cycle without substantive, structural change and many appear to be unaware that a 'quiet revolution' is in the process of profoundly changing academe around them. This revolution has been termed *academic capitalism* by Slaughter and Leslie (1997) in a well-documented book of the same title. I will draw on their work as background for a call to all members of the academic community to recognize the need for a systemic view of change in postsecondary education and for a different perspective on why all members of the academic community need to become actively involved in the changes that are shaping the future of higher education.

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Academic capitalism is defined as "institutional and professorial market or market-like efforts to secure external moneys" (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997, p. 8). In the 1980s and 1990s academic capitalism flourished as government support for education declined, corporate interest in new products and processes coincided with the university's search for increased funding, and as the government sought to enhance national competitiveness by linking postsecondary education to business innovation. Many within higher education did not recognize the ways in which higher education funding had been impacted by world events and believed the situation to be temporary. However, States saw an absolute decline in funding for postsecondary education for the first time in 1993-94 and there has been a steady decline in revenues as a share of collected tax since 1988. As unrestricted resources became scarce, universities began to compete with each other for partnerships with business and industry and for tuition dollars. Public higher education institutions became dependent on sources beyond the government and that process is already changing the roles, rewards, and structures within academic institutions (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997).

Some Major Impacts of Academic Capitalism

What follows is a brief summary of the major impacts of academic capitalism on higher education identified in Slaughter and Leslie's work. Space does not permit an in-depth review of their findings, and the reader is encouraged to consult the extensive discussion in *Academic Capitalism Politics, Policies and the Entrepreneurial University*.

University Level

The wave of academic capitalism is sweeping higher education. Although some institutions have been partially insulated by unique missions or large endowments, it is a growing phenomenon. At the institutional level rewards now flow to academic units that build external funding. There is an expansion of sales and service functions from branding and promoting logo emblazoned products to marketing web-based services. Campuses now resemble malls with recognizable private food and book vendors. Admissions functions have become enrollment management as the pressure increases to compete for new students. More and more administrative responsibilities are pushed down to the academic unit level. There is a decline in collegial governance with more important decisions being made at the central level to respond quickly to external constituents. There is growing tension between academics and central administration.

Department Level

There is an increase of hyper-competition between academic units for scarce resources. (This competition has exaggerated already present disciplinary biases.) Fields "close to the market," such as business and engineering, continue to gain power while those less close, such as the liberal arts, are losing influence. The salary differentials between faculty members in fields that can access external dollars and those fields

that cannot continue to grow. Fields further from the market are also experiencing increased teaching loads. There is an increase in the numbers of part-time faculty. Less and less importance is being placed on the quality of undergraduate and graduate instruction as reward systems shift and the maintenance of external partnerships absorbs increasing amounts of faculty time.

Faculty

Faculty members are under pressure to pursue external funding. There is a shift away from community-minded attitudes toward attitudes of personal gain. Faculty members have less time to devote to instruction. Faculty, especially untenured junior faculty, are experiencing high levels of stress due to an increasing number of faculty roles. Maintaining external relationships demands larger and larger amounts of faculty time, and less time is available for other roles. Faculty members are becoming resistant to committee and university service as demands on their time increase. There is a decline in collegiality and campus community. There is less allegiance to the institution as faculty increasingly view themselves more and more as independent entrepreneurs.

Research

Overall there is less government funding available for research. There is less basic, or curiosity-driven research, and more specialized and applied research. External constituents are setting more and more of the university's research agenda. Faculty members engaged in research have less allegiance to the university as centers and institutes become increasingly funded by external, non-governmental sources.

Students

Students are experiencing steady tuition increases. More and more students are seeking means/end education for career advancement. There is a growing resistance to broad educational experience as per course costs increase. Students are developing a shopping mall, consumer viewpoint of knowledge as a commodity. There is greater competition among students for spots in prestigious institutions. Broad access to higher education is being threatened as tuition spirals upward.

If you stroll around university campuses in the United States today and talk with faculty, students, and staff, you will hear stories that illustrate the impacts summarized above. These impacts are being felt not only in the United States, but also throughout Western higher education. Slaughter and Leslie's research was carried out in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom in addition to the US. Overall, three important factors can be gleaned from their insightful analysis. First, the linkage between the capitalistic processes within higher education institutions and globalization and national policies designed to strengthen the position of the US in global markets highlights the fact that current economic changes in higher education in the U.S. are structural not temporary. Therefore, they are unlikely to disappear soon, even if there is concerted political activity. Second, academic capitalism as a response to resource dependence is not just

the predilection of local university administrators. It is a response that is taking place around the globe. Finally, and most importantly, the analysis shows that the process of academic capitalism is already well underway. This silent revolution has been changing higher education in profound ways. With the current downturn in the U.S. economy, higher education's competition for scarcer private dollars is only intensifying.

Is Today's Academic Capitalism Really of a Different Character?

Since elements of academic capitalism have been present in universities for some time, how does the current situation differ? The most notable example of early academic capitalism is the commercialization of intercollegiate sports. Although issues such as the quality of education for athletes and gender equity were raised, for the most part, big-time intercollegiate sports have been accepted by the university community for several reasons: because sports have evolved as part of the university tradition, because the NCAA oversees their integrity, and because there is widespread recognition of the important spirit and loyalty they engender in current and prospective students and alumni. Whether one supports intercollegiate sports or not, there is yet another aspect that sets academic capitalism in sports apart. It does not have a direct impact on the instructional, service, and research missions of the institution. It does not alter faculty time, commitment, and roles. The academic capitalism that is sweeping institutions today is of a different magnitude and character.

One justification for the current spread of academic capitalism has been the public's growing disenchantment with the cost of maintaining higher education institutions combined with the university's lack of engagement in addressing social issues and problems. It is argued that academic capitalism is needed to link the institution with its external constituents. However, academic capitalism is not the first model for linking the university to the external community. Conceived in the Morrill Act 140 years ago, the land grant university was designed to apply the best of its knowledge to further society and address its problems. The Kellogg Commission (*Returning to Our Roots*, 2001) has called for a renewal of the land grant mission and its relevance through what it terms *engaged* universities. How does this model differ from the university model based on academic capitalism? Figure 1 compares various elements of the traditional university, the engaged university, and traditional business model as applied to higher education.

Figure 1: Comparison of University Models*

Model	Traditional	Engaged	Business
Strategic Goals	Long-term	Short and Long-term	Short-term
Orientation	Inward	Connected	Outward
Focus	Disciplines & Knowledge Discovery	Societal Needs, Knowledge Discovery & Application	External Customer Needs, Knowledge Application
Student Role	Passive	Active Participant	Consumer
View of Knowledge	Authority based	Inquiry based	Commodity
Research	Basic (Curiosity-driven)	Basic & Applied (Curiosity & Society -driven)	Applied (Market-driven)
Primary Delivery	Face-to-face	Face-to-face & Technology Enhanced	Technology
Mode of Learning	Authority	Inquiry	Directed
Governance	Faculty	Shared	Administrative
Funding	Church & Tuition	State & Tuition	Business & Tuition
Disciplinary bias	Liberal Arts	Liberal arts & Professional	Closest to the Market
Mission emphasis	Teaching	Teaching, Research & Service	Targeted Research

Based on Awbrey and Scott, 1993; Slaughter & Leslie, 1997; *Returning to Our Roots* Kellogg Commission, January 2001.

The Problem: Why is the Revolution Quiet?

Reflective dialogue is needed regarding the advantages, disadvantages, and consequences of these and other models of post-secondary education. However, the quiet revolution of academic capitalism is currently shaping the future of higher education without internal institutional dialogue about the impact of market activities on institutional models or values and without national debate about the outcomes of the process on the people being educated and ultimately on society. Why has the dialogue not occurred? The reasons are complex but they take us back to our discussion of mental models. Many faculty members believe a 'traditional' university structure is best for preserving academic values and achieving academic goals. They believe this view is substantiated by the endurance of 'traditional' universities for generations. Many administrators, on the other hand, believe that 'traditional' business practices are the most effective means of insuring the survival of higher education institutions and meeting the needs of the external community. The either/or nature of these dualistic views has not allowed room for discussion about how best to achieve a future that meets the needs of the entire university community and the public it serves.

Let us consider these views more closely. A view of the university as a structure that has "endured" without change is an outcome of seeing organizations as closed systems -- seeing them as things rather than patterns of human interaction (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, and Smith, 1994). Although the university has existed for centuries, it has not been unchanging. Its current form evolved from the transformations of the past such as the additions of research and service to the instructional mission. Thus, the 'traditional' university has continually evolved. Indeed, there are many 'traditions' of the past such as the exclusion of minorities and women from higher education to which most of us would not want to return. In contrast, organizational systems today are viewed as open and nonlinear, like organic systems that grow and change (Sherman and Schultz, 1998). It is not difficult to understand how universities can be continuous without being static if we recall Plato's description of organic systems:

> [We] describe ever-changing life as nevertheless the same life, as when one is said to be the same person from childhood through old age, even though one does not have the same properties as before. For one is continually becoming a new person ... And this is true ... more astonishing yet, as regards our knowledge, not merely does some of it come into existence while other elements of it perish, so that in what we know we never stay the same person, but the same is true for every particular instance of knowledge . . . Every mortal thing is preserved in existence in

> this way only: not by staying exactly the same forever but by replacing the old with the new. (Plato, Symposium 207d in Ransdell, 1999, paragraph 8)

Holding back change in an open system is like trying to hold back the river of time. It is not a question of whether universities will change – they continue to do so. The question is how they will change and whether that change will benefit the society they serve.

Consider also the view that what the university needs is a strong dose of 'traditional' business practices. Ironically, in many cases we find administrators and board members busy applying nineteenth and twentieth century industrial age business practices in attempts to bring higher education into the twenty-first century. Yet, enlightened corporations have moved away from the errors of past decades – mechanistic models, the fragmentation of linear and segmented work, depersonalization of employees, and dependence on overspecialization— toward a fuller recognition of the organization as a complex of interrelated systems functioning together with emphasis on collaboration over competition. New business practices are emerging based on flexible structures in which networked, team-oriented management is replacing a hierarchical, command and control orientation (Galbraith and Lawler, 1993). New business practices value the members of the organization and recognize the importance of the constituencies they serve. New style businesses strive to create environments that foster creative thought and problem solving.

By focusing only on the rigidity and bureaucracy of institutions, many overlook elements of universities that already resemble postindustrial organizations, including: organization-wide forums for dialogue and debate, local decision-making and autonomy, and large numbers of highly educated employees. Nevertheless, universities are still plagued by non-permeable boundaries and closed-system thinking. They too must change to survive, but is it necessary for higher education institutions to repeat the process of becoming 'traditional' command and control businesses, to lose the elements which are already aligned with postindustrial organizations, and then, like other traditional businesses, to undertake the process of recreating themselves? Can we instead over-leap this process to view our institutions in new ways that allow us to recognize and expand on enlightened practices while at the same time leaving behind unenlightened elements? To do so will require us to move from a culture based on fear and defensiveness to one of openness and collective problem-solving.

Universities represent the most knowledge-rich organizations in the world. They have a unique opportunity to build institutions that expand upon their strengths without repeating the cycle of frustration and failure that many other business organizations are enduring during this transition from industrial to a postindustrial society. The question becomes: Can we, as an academic community, develop organizational models that embody our values while financially sustaining our institutions and fulfilling our mission in today's world?

Lessons and Solutions from Organizational Theory

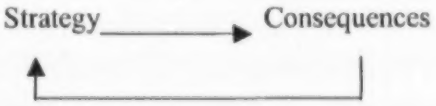
Public universities are in a precarious position. Their funding support from the government has continued to erode. This is a very real problem that cannot be ignored if institutions are to survive. Administrators and boards have turned to marketing strategies to make up for the lost revenue through increased enrollments, tuition increases, and business partnerships. They are focused heavily on one dimension of the organization – its financial survival. The intent is to provide positive support for the institution. However, focusing narrowly on the financial aspect of the institution can lead to overlooking some less positive outcomes of academic capitalism.

To reflect on these consequences we must surface and make visible the assumptions that underlie the application of academic capitalism. Our assumptions form the basis of the mental models we use to interpret our experience of the world. "It would be truly naive to assume that we ever have a direct experience of something and then act on the basis of that experience. Our experience is always mediated by interpretation . . .Our behaviors therefore, always occur within a context of interpretation" (Sherman and Schultz, 1998, 146-147).

People design strategies to achieve their goals. People in organizations plan, implement, and review their strategies based on theories they have about the world and the situations they face (Hinken, 2001). Research has shown that the theories, or mental models, people use in practice are, for the most part, tacit. Few people are consciously aware of them. It is these unquestioned *theories-in-use* that often guide our actions and strategies not our *espoused theories* (Argyris and Schon, 1974, Argyris, 1980, Argyris, 1987, and cited in Smith, 2001) Thus, quite often the world-view and values we espouse are not the world-view and values implied by our behavior. This is not just a difference between what we say and what we do (between theory and action) but between two different theories *of* action---one we profess and one we actually use (Argyris, Putnam & McLain, 1985, p. 82 as cited in Anderson, 1997). Organizational effectiveness results from developing congruence between espoused theory and the theory-in-use that guides our

actions – between the principles and values we verbalize and claim as underlying our actions and the tacit principles and values we use to actually make decisions and act. Why is this important? It is important for at least two reasons. First, because a lack of congruence between the mental models on which we base our actions and those we profess can lead to unintended or counterproductive consequences. Second, when the consequences of our actions are not what we expect, we tend to examine our strategies and not look behind them to reflect on what underlies the strategy.

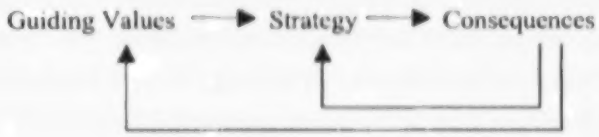
An example might help to illustrate. If you are responsible for managing an airport, after 9/11, you might decide to use new strategies to improve passenger security. Once you implement the strategies you may ask: "What did we expect to happen?" "What were the results?" and "How might we alter our strategy next time?" These questions are all asked from *within* the mental model you hold of the situation. The questions focus on feedback from specific consequences of implementing the strategies chosen.



(From Argyris and Schon, 1974)

If, however, you continue to add more and more security measures to make passengers safer and safer, at some point, you may lose passengers because they will begin to experience unexpected consequences, namely long delays and missed flights. This can happen if the mental model (or theory-in-use) behind your strategy is not examined. Your espoused theory might be to run a safe, efficient airport. But your theory in use is that safety is good and the more safety the better. Whenever we take action or make a decision there is a set of underlying values that we try to balance. In our airport example, there are several such values: cost/benefit of security measures, desire for passengers to feel and be safe, desire for passengers to make their scheduled flights on time, etc. By focusing only on one value, we have created a situation whereby our strategy (adding safety measures) may be effective but if continually escalated, it also has counterproductive consequences on other values. It is not enough to list our guiding values or to simply prioritize them. We must look specifically at how our theories-in-use and strategies impact them. We must seek out, surface and examine feedback about consequences. If we also ask questions such as: "Why did we select this strategy?" "What made us think it will work?" "What have been the unintended consequences on each of our guiding values?" we are asking

questions *about* our mental model and challenging our theory-in-use. This opens up a much broader perspective and provides us with much more information for evaluating our effectiveness (Hinken, 2001).



(From Argyris and Schon, 1974)

The point is to "uncover" our implicit mental models and reflect on our theories-in-use. Other ways of doing this include the use of public testing and research to inform us (Argyris, 1982). The research done by Leslie and Slaughter can act as such a lens that allows us to see some of the unintended outcomes that are happening to our institutions. Another way of openly bringing our mental models into view is through dialogue with people whose views differ from our own. Such dialogue within the university can lead to greater understanding of the positive and negative consequences of using a strategy such as academic capitalism. This is one reason that maintaining community and an open environment in universities is important – not simply because it is pleasant to reside in such a community but because the ideas of all members of the institution are important to the organization's survival.

'Unfreezing' (Lewin, 1951) is an organizational term that has come to mean many things. First, it means that for change to take place members of the organization must see not only a need for change but also an urgent reason to change (Kotter, 1995). Slaughter and Leslie have made the case for urgency by showing us that, out of financial necessity, higher education is already undergoing a quiet revolution that is having some unintended consequences. Second, Lewin's concept of unfreezing warns us that attempts to change without addressing an organization's cultures and values will fail in the long run.

Conclusion

The major financial advantages of academic capitalism include the generation of funds to replace those lost by the decline in government funding and the increase in unrestricted funds through the generation of more tuition dollars. Nevertheless, those who believe in the 'invisible hand of the market' (Smith, 1776/1976, p. 456) must also recognize the difference between short-term and long-term gains. Even if higher education institutions become totally successful at balancing

budgets through academic capitalism, if the *way* in which this is done leads to a loss of quality in the best higher education system in the world just as we enter the age of knowledge and information, if it results in denying a large segment of our population access to the highest levels of education of which they are capable, and if higher education no longer broadly prepares citizens to live and participate in a democratic society, then we will have surrendered long-term interests for short-term solutions. Academic capitalism is not the inherent evil some believe nor is it the unmitigated blessing others imagine. It is a strategy that has the potential both greatly to help and greatly to harm universities. The use of such a strategy needs to be consciously undertaken and widely discussed with broad awareness of and input regarding intended *and* unintended consequences not only on the financial health of the institution but also on the university's mission and guiding values. Only in this way can the advantages and disadvantages be understood and a conscious effort be made to avoid or lessen negative impacts.

At the national level public support of higher education implies responsibilities. Faculty members in public institutions are not just entrepreneurs. The opportunity to engage in a self-determined research agenda and to freely pursue ideas is born of the belief that such endeavors will ultimately contribute to the good of society. The education of students is not simply a commodity purchased by their tuition. It is subsidized by a public that expects graduates to give back to society. Public universities also have a 'social contract' to improve society through the education of students not only for careers but also for life as citizens. Governmental support of education implies recognition by society that education is a 'social good' – that it not only benefits the individuals who receive it (or those who employ them) but also society as a whole. In the past Americans have upheld education as an investment in the nation and its future. *The erosion of public funding that has led to academic capitalism implies a shift not merely in funding sources but also in the deeper values that underlie education's role in society.* This is ground for very serious national dialogue about the quiet revolution that is taking place in higher education.

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